



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## SOUTH DAKOTA DEDICATES BRIDGE HONORING FALLEN HERO KENNETH DEGROOT

On Wednesday, May 31, South Dakota dedicated the Big Sioux River Bridge on US HWY 14, near Volga, in honor of U.S. Army Corporal Kenneth L. DeGroot.

DeGroot, was a member of the 77<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and was killed in action while fighting the enemy in North Korea on September 7, 1951.

Naming this South Dakota bridge in honor of CPL DeGroot gives us an opportunity of remembrance, reflection, respect, and gratitude. Dedication this bridge is a small token to honor Kenneth, and to reinforce that he will not be forgotten.

The men and women whose names do, or will appear, on South Dakota bridges honor them were American soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast guardsmen who served during troubled times. Their sacrifices need to be remembered.

South Dakota will dedicate eleven more bridges this year. Upon completion of these namings, South Dakota will have designated 41 bridges honoring 44 veterans.

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# MEMORIAL DAY

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs hosted two Memorial Day programs on Monday, May 29. The first program was held at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery in Sioux Falls.



Remarks were provided by Governor Kristi Noem, Major General (Ret) Tim Reisch, SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard, and SDVC

Superintendent Erin Brown. Music was provided by Sunny Radio, Brandon Valley High School Brass Quintet, and El Riad Shrine Fife and Drum Corps.

SDDVA's second program was held at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs. Speaking at this program

were SD District 8 Senator Casey Crabtree and MJFSVH Superintendent Chuck Johnson. Music was provided by the Hot Springs Community Band.



Special thanks to all the SDDVA staff and volunteers that assisted with the preparations for these two successful events.

In addition to these two programs, SDDVA had a presence at four more programs throughout the state. SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock delivered the keynote address at the Memorial Day program in Clark, and SDDVA Veterans Cemetery Superintendent Erin Brown spoke at the program in Garretson.

SDDVA Field Service Officers Kevin Bowen and Kevin Swanson attended the Memorial Day programs in Kimball and Pierre.





# SDDVA STAFF PARTICIPATE IN MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT

SDDVA's Shannon Phillips and Jeri Smith served as guardians on this week's Midwest Honor Flight Mission 15.

Shannon and Jeri reported to duty late Tuesday afternoon and returned back to Sioux Falls Wednesday evening about 10:30 pm. Watch next week's newsletter for the rest of their story!

Mission 15 had 84 veterans and was funded by Elsie Van Beek. Elsie is the sister of Midwest Honor Flight CEO Aaron Van Beek. What started as a small family challenge from Aaron to Elsie to raise \$50,000 to fund a flight, ended with one very determined and dedicated young lady raising \$85,000 and funding Mission 15!



Midwest Honor Flight has two more missions this year—Seed for Success Foundation Mission 16 and Clifford and LaVonne Graese Foundation Mission 17. Both will be held later this fall.

Visit <https://www.midwesthonorflight.org/> to learn more about Midwest Honor Flight.

# WHAT'S BREWING

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs hosted another successful “What’s Brewing Veterans” event last week in Mobridge.

SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock and Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard provided overviews of the Department and the respective divisions, outlined the role of the county veterans service officers, and the important part that the county and tribal veterans service officers play in assisting veterans and their families. State Veterans Home Superintendent Chuck Johnson highlighted the mission, activities, and features of the state veterans home.

SDDVA Veterans Field Service Officer Kevin Swanson reviewed the Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act. The PACT Act is perhaps the largest health care and benefit expansion in VA history to assist Vietnam Era Veterans, Gulf War Era Veterans and Post 9-11 Veterans.

CVSO Peter Weinzirl (Walworth County) was on hand to visit with veterans and answer any questions the veterans had.

Following the SDDVA presentation, veterans were asked to share their questions, concerns, and frustrations. Veterans’ issues focused on the PACT Act, VA healthcare, C&P exams, and travel reimbursement.



# STATE VETERANS HOME RECOGNIZED FOR WATER QUALITY

The South Dakota Department of Ag and Natural Resources recently recognized the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home for their water quality. Since 2016, the Home has always met or exceeded federal and state water requirements.





# WHITLOCK DELIVERS MEMORIAL DAY MESSAGE IN CLARK

SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock shared center stage with some remarkable young students this week during the Memorial Day program in Clark. The program, coordinated by Clark County Veterans Service Officer Darin Lewis, paid tribute to great and brave Americans—recognizing their valor.

In addition to the speeches and music, four students shared their patriotism messages with attendees. Each of them reflected on the sacred bond of selfless sacrifice that links our freedoms, our laws, our lives, and our rights as citizens of a blessed land to the sacrifices of the men and women who don the uniforms of our armed forces and their families.



# VA RELAXES MASKING AT HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it has relaxed the masking requirement at VA medical facilities. VA facilities will no longer universally require masks in most clinical areas.

“Now that the public health emergency has ended, we are updating our masking policies to reflect our new reality while still ensuring the safety of the veterans we serve,” said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal. “Except for the highest-risk areas and situations, masking will be greatly relaxed for veterans and clinicians at VA health care facilities.”

Masks will continue to be required for staff, veterans, and visitors while in the high-risk areas listed below, including waiting areas:

- Transplant units
- Dialysis
- Chemotherapy units
- Emergency department and urgent care
- Open bay medical intensive care units
- Spinal cord injury and community living centers (staff and visitors only, with the exception that visitors to CLCs and SCI may unmask when visiting with a patient within that patient’s room or outside).

Masking also continues to be required:

- For those with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection or other viral respiratory infection.
- For VHA healthcare personnel upon request of a veteran patient, caregiver, or family member.
- Where local leadership warrants continued masking is required.

During the pandemic, VA delivered more care to more veterans than ever before — providing more than 332 million health care appointments to veterans, caring for more than 870,000 veterans with COVID-19, and vaccinating more than 4.4 million veterans. Moving forward, the VA will monitor any changes to CDC guidelines and update infection control recommendations as necessary.

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **VA relaxes masking at health care facilities**



## GARY SINISE FOUNDATION

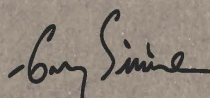
PRESENTS

A Heroes Journey Production

# Last Out

## Elegy of a Green Beret

"I am honored to support Scott Mann's powerful play *Last Out: Elegy of a Green Beret*. Performed by an amazing all veteran cast, it is a war story that shines a light on the sacrifices our veteran's and military families make to keep us free. Every American should see this play."



South Dakota Military  
Heritage Alliance

1600 W. Russell St.  
Sioux Falls, SD 57104

July 28-29, 2023



SCAN QR CODE  
FORTICKETS

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT  
[GARYSINISEFOUNDATION.ORG/LAST-OUT](https://GARYSINISEFOUNDATION.ORG/LAST-OUT)

WRITTEN BY  
U.S. LT. COL. (RET.) SCOTT MANN

DIRECTED BY  
KARL BURY



### SERVING AMERICA'S HEROES & THEIR FAMILIES

We're building custom homes for severely wounded heroes, organizing healing retreats for families of the fallen, hosting uplifting events for active duty service members, and so much more. Join us today. Visit [GarySiniseFoundation.org](https://GarySiniseFoundation.org)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Jun 8—11—American Legion State Conference—Oacoma  
Jun 9—Veterans Stand Down—Pine Ridge Pow Wow Grounds—Pine Ridge—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)  
Jun 14—Chick-Fil-A Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser  
Jun 15-18—VFW State Convention—(4-H Grounds)—Mitchell  
Jun 19—State Offices Closed  
Jun 22—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—PFC Cy Kaiser—U.S. Army Reserve Center—(115 S. Roosevelt Street)—Aberdeen—1:30 pm (CT)  
Jun 24 —SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SGT Philip Iyotte—Community Events Center—(501 3rd Street)—White River—10:00 am (CT)  
Jun 25—3rd Annual Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—Sioux Falls—(starts at the Alliance and ends at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery)—2:00 pm (CT)  
Jul 1—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—CW2 Scott A. Saboe—Lake Gospel Hall—(105 Lincoln Avenue)—Willow Lake—10:00 am (CT)  
Jul 1—Veterans for Veterans Poker Run—The Depot—(210 S. Main Street)—Mitchell—11:00 am (CT)  
Jul 1—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—HM2 Charles T. Langenfeld—Redlin Art Center—(1200 33rd Street NE #310)—Watertown—2:00 pm (CT)  
Jul 4—State Offices Closed  
Jul 4—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SSG Robb Rolwing—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—2:00 pm (CT)  
Jul 7—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SP5 Samuel J. Jorgensen—Community Center—(112 N. Main Street)—Chamberlain—2:00 pm (CT)  
Jul 17—Tee it Up for the Troops—Arrowhead Country Club—Rapid City—8:00 am (MT)  
Jul 19—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Sisseton—9:00 am (CT)  
Jul 20—Rosebud Sioux Tribe Veterans Stand Down—Sinte Gleska University—(101 Antelope Circle)—Mission—10:00 am (CT)  
Jul 28-29—"Last Out" production—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls  
Jul 29-30—Sioux Falls Air Show  
Jul 29—Korean War/Defense Veterans Appreciation Day—Brookings County Outdoor Adventure Center—(2810 22nd Avenue S)—Brookings—9:00 am to 3:00 pm (CT)  
Aug 10-11—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Sioux Falls Convention Center  
Aug 19—SFVAHCS Show and Shine  
Aug 26—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—LTC Gordon J. Lippman—Hill City—1:30 pm (MT)  
Aug 28—Barrel House Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight  
Aug 31—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair  
Aug 31—Sept 4—SD State Fair  
Sep 4—State Offices Closed  
Sep 5—7—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls  
Sep 16—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—LT Peter H. Monfore—Community Hall—(605 8th Street)—Springfield—2:00 pm (CT)  
Sep 20—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Rapid City



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 7—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—WO1 Roger S. Cameron—Community Building—(311 W. Main)—Pierpont—1:30 pm (CT)  
Oct 9—State Offices Closed  
Oct 14—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—1LT Thomas M. Martin—Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)  
Oct 21—Elvis Night/50's Dance Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls  
Nov 4—Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)  
Nov 10—State Offices Closed  
Nov 13—Barrel House Day of Giving for SDVC Wreaths Across America  
Nov 15—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Sioux Falls  
Nov 23—State Offices Closed  
Dec 16—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)  
Dec 25—State Offices Closed

## 2024 Events

Jan 10—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre  
Feb 16—18—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Deadwood  
Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre  
Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

## 2025 Events

Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma  
Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron  
Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

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